

REMARKS

In view of the above amendments and the following remarks, reconsideration of the rejections contained in the Office Action of March 4, 2008 is respectfully requested.

In the outstanding Office Action, the Examiner withdrew the previous indication of allowability, and set forth new prior art rejections of the some of the previously-presented claims. In particular, the Examiner rejected independent claims 14, 15, and 24, and dependent claims 25, 26, 28, and 30 as being unpatentable over the Enomoto reference (US 2003/0032284). However, the Examiner also indicated that claims 16 and 31-35 were still allowed, and that dependent claims 27 and 29 contained allowable subject matter. Consequently, the claims have now been further amended as explained below.

As an initial matter, the Examiner is requested to note that allowed claims 16 and 31-35 have now been amended or otherwise modified, and so it is submitted that the Examiner's indication of allowability of these claims is still applicable.

Rejected independent claims 14, 15, and 24 have now each been amended so as to incorporate the subject matter of allowable dependent claim 27, and dependent claim 27 has been cancelled. In particular, each of amended independent claims 14, 15, and 24 now recites that the decreasing of the grain boundaries comprises performing a heat treatment on the metallic silicide layer *in an atmosphere that includes an oxidizable gas of less than 100 ppm*. Therefore, in view of the Examiner's previous indication that dependent claim 27 contains allowable subject matter, it is respectfully submitted that each of amended independent claims 14, 15, and 24 is now in condition for allowance.

In view of the above amendments and remarks, it is submitted that the present application is now in condition for allowance. However, if the Examiner should have any comments or suggestions to help speed the prosecution of this application, the Examiner is requested to contact the Applicant's undersigned representative.

Respectfully submitted,

Takashi OHSAKO et al.

By: 

W. Douglas Hahm
Registration No. 44,142
Attorney for Applicants

WDH/akl/lc
Washington, D.C. 20006-1021
Telephone (202) 721-8200
Facsimile (202) 721-8250
July 7, 2008